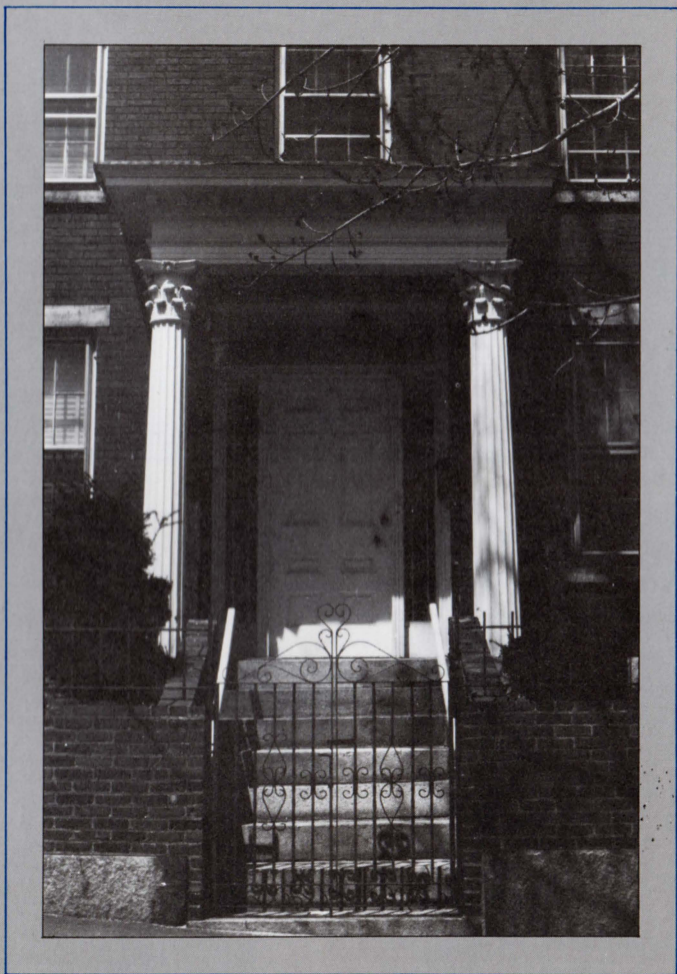


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# Chapel Hill

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Lowell's Historic Neighborhoods

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Chapel Hill, from *Bird's Eye View of Lowell*, 1879.

At the center of Lowell, Massachusetts lie the rivers, dams, canals, and factories which contributed to the growth of one of America's greatest manufacturing centers. Although considerable attention has been focused on the study of Lowell's central core, the majority of Lowell's residents in the mid- to late-nineteenth century resided outside the city center. The colorful names of Lowell's neighborhoods — such as Chapel Hill, Belvidere Village, Pawtucketville, Centralville and the Highlands — provide only a hint of the important role these areas had in shaping the city's history.

Among the earliest of these neighborhoods is Chapel Hill, with representative residential architectural styles from nearly every period of the city's industrial development. Enveloping a hilly site, Chapel Hill is bounded at the east by the Concord River, at the west by Gorham Street, and at the north and south by Charles Street and Hale's Brook.

Chapel Hill's settlement began in the 1820s when Lowell was emerging as a major textile center. Although many of the town's residents were employed in the cotton mills and

lived in company-owned houses, the growing community attracted others — shopkeepers, carpenters, masons, policemen — who supplied the goods and services required by a rapidly expanding town.

For individuals wishing to build their own houses, Chapel Hill proved to be the only available land convenient to the center of Lowell that was neither in corporation ownership nor separated from the mills by a river. Unlike Centralville and Washington Square in Belvidere, which date from the 1830s, there was no predetermined plan for the growth of Chapel Hill. Instead of following a previously laid-out grid of streets and houselots, the area grew organically, conforming to the topography and to the random sale and development of house lots. Paralleling the north-south axis of Gorham Street (the original colonial route between East Chelmsford and Billerica), Central Street wrapped around the hill, Chapel Street ran over its ridgeline, and Lawrence Street followed the Concord River. A network of short cross streets (Charles, North, Ames, Mill and Elm) soon connected them.



By 1831 over 50 buildings had been erected, including two churches. These early churches, on their hilly site, lent the area its name. Although the majority of residents lived in small single family Greek Revival and Italianate houses, Central and Chapel Streets hosted more sophisticated Greek Revival double houses erected for prominent individuals including a mayor, members of the city's first government and prosperous merchants. Groceries and shops were also built along Central and Chapel Streets, usually located in the ground floor of a dwelling.

The small lots and closely-built houses of Walnut, Cedar, Linden and Keene Streets were the result of an 1845 auction of excess land held by Locks and Canals, the primary corporation for Lowell's real estate and water power. The demand for housing proved so intense that the Locks and Canals lots were quickly built upon with small houses of nearly-identical appearance. Among the other parcels bought from Locks and Canals was the South Common, later laid out by the City as a public park.

By 1868 all of Chapel Hill's streets were laid out. As land throughout the city became scarce, the small-scale character of the neighborhood was slowly broken by multiple dwellings of three or four stories, a practice which continued to the turn of the century. Alleys and courts provided access to additional buildings which were crowded onto back portions of lots.

Although the earliest residents of Chapel Hill were primarily of New England ancestry, by the Civil War the neighborhood had become an attractive destination for upwardly mobile Irish-Catholic immigrants, lured to Lowell by work opportunities in the mills. Their numbers had been increasing steadily



**Rocha Brothers Grocery Store, photograph ca. 1906.** Joao Rocha opened his grocery store on Charles Street in 1906 at a time when large numbers of Portuguese immigrants were arriving in Lowell and settling on Chapel Hill.

over the second half of the 19th century; in 1842 they erected St. Peter's Church, a small brick structure just north of Chapel Hill. Fifty years later it was replaced by the present St. Peter's Church on Gorham Street. The imposing stone landmark was designed by Patrick C. Keely, a nationally-known architect.

Coincident with the building of St. Peter's were the first waves of Portuguese settlement in Lowell and within Chapel Hill. In the early 20th century, several Portuguese grocery stores opened on Charles and Gorham Streets, and the Portuguese St. Anthony's parish was founded. From an initial membership of 950 in 1901, the parish grew to 2500 by 1933.

Today, Chapel Hill's impressive mixture of architecture and ethnic history can be appreciated by both residents and visitors.



# The Chapel Hill Landscape

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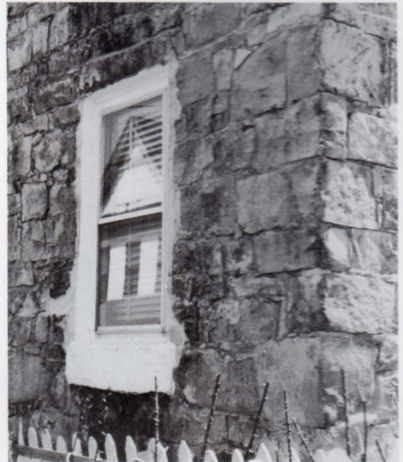


The streets of Chapel Hill were seldom built up at the same time. In a single block, mill workers's Greek Revival Style houses from the 1830s and 1840s, high-styled Italianate and Second Empire merchants's houses erected mid-century and Queen Anne multi-family dwellings built for the families who lived in Chapel Hill during its last period of growth can all be found.

In addition to the many interesting architectural details crafted by local builders, there are other features of the Chapel Hill landscape to notice. Building stone from local quarries and canal beds is visible in walls and foundations. Ornamental ironwork can be seen on roofs and fences. Natural features, including old trees, and the Concord River and views from the higher elevations in Chapel Hill, are also part of the neighborhood landscape.

**1. Detail, 23 Ames St., ca. 1840.** The only stone residence on Chapel Hill, 23 Ames St. was built of cut granite blocks with rubblestone infill. Although the granite was probably hauled from a nearby Chelmsford quarry, the rubblestone was obtained during excavation of Lowell's canal beds.

**2. Concord River from Lawrence Street.** The Concord River bounds the eastern edge of Chapel Hill, shortly before it empties into the Merrimack River. Long the site of water-powered mills, the river is a major visual asset to the neighborhood. Yards and gardens of Lawrence Street houses mark the former sites of grist, paper, and cotton mills.





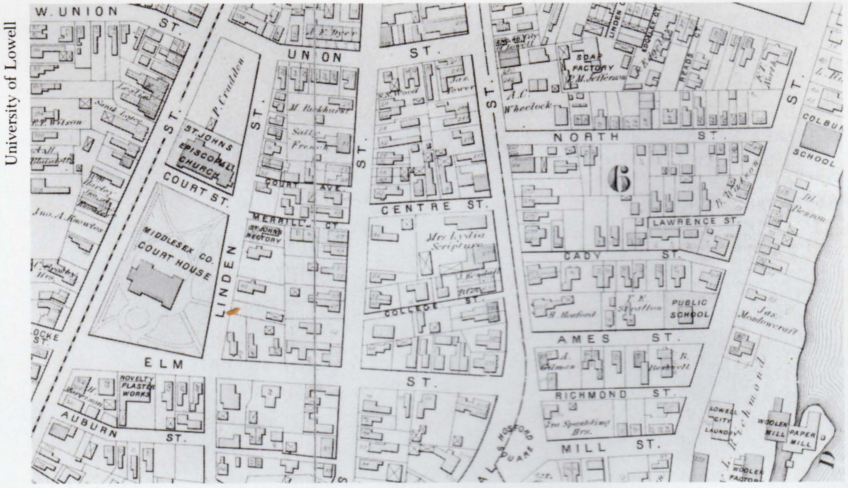


3. A special aspect of the Lowell landscape is the many adjoining vegetable gardens found within Chapel Hill. Frequently encompassing all available yard space, by mid-summer the gardens yield large quantities of produce. Fig trees, indigenous to Mediterranean countries, have been planted by Portuguese residents who take care to protect them from New England winters. Shrubs, bulbs and other plant material enhance the small front yards.

4. Mid-19th century streets were frequently planted with trees at regular intervals to provide shade and visual relief. Although the automobile, asphalt paving and pollution have contributed to the demise of many of these trees, a few have survived in their modern urban environment.







**Detail, 1879 Atlas Page.** This section of an atlas printed for the City of Lowell in 1879 illustrates how densely settled Chapel Hill was by the late 19th century. Most of the buildings were small frame dwellings, with a few brick structures located along the major streets. The soap factory near North Street was the only non-textile industry in the neighborhood. Note the narrow courts leading from Charles Street, allowing access to buildings erected on rear lots. A row of similar houses erected after the 1845 Locks and Canals land auction can be seen on Walnut Street.



**5. Cady Street.** A network of short, narrow cross streets lined with houses abutting the sidewalk connects the main north-south arteries of Chapel Hill (Lawrence, Central, Chapel and Gorham Streets). Many of these were in place as early as 1832, and much of Chapel Hill's uniqueness is derived from these early pedestrian-oriented passageways.



**6. Hosford Square.** At the junction of Mill, Wamesit, Elm, Richmond and Central Streets is Hosford Square, named after Hocum Hosford, a prominent mid-19th century Chapel Hill resident. The square offers welcome open space amidst the tightly built-up streets. Along its perimeter are examples of every architectural style in the neighborhood.





**7. View Looking West from Chapel Street.** From the top of Chapel Hill it is possible to view landmarks and natural features in several directions. The towers of the old courthouse (1850) and St. Peter's Church (1892-1900), the parish of many neighborhood residents, are visible to the west, while to the east Fort Hill Park can be seen. For many years, the towers and buildings of the city's cotton mills were a familiar sight to the north.

**8. 573 Central St., 1870s.** Throughout the 19th century, fences were a common part of the landscape. Originally constructed for utilitarian purposes, primarily to keep animals out of gardens, in the city they became equally important for aesthetic reasons. Iron fences were used almost exclusively in urban areas, as a railing along stairs or balconies or encircling a small front yard. Just as architectural styles changed, fence patterns varied to reflect the period of the house and the status of its owner. Also of note is the cast-iron grillwork on the Greek Revival house at 503 Central.





# Chapel Hill: A Century of Building

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**9. Abel Rugg House, 7 Wamesit St., ca. 1822.** Sited on a slight rise of land, 7 Wamesit St. is the earliest house on Chapel Hill. Early services of the Baptist Church were held here in 1822-24. 19th century owners were associated with the paper and woolen mills on Lawrence Street.



**10. Scripture's Bakery, 547 Central St., ca. 1826-31.** Another of the early buildings on Chapel Hill is the residence and bakery built by Isaac Scripture. Scripture lived on the upper floors, housing his bakery in the basement. (A local club has been located here since 1933.) Broad-gable facades are fairly common on Lowell's Greek Revival houses, but few are single-family residences.



**11. Spalding House, 1-3 Centre St., ca. 1837.** Like Scripture's Bakery, the Spalding House was used as both a residence and a shop. The topography of the hill encouraged the construction of exposed basement shops, with main floors reserved for living space. The Greek Revival style entry portico, with its carved capitals derived from the Temple of the Winds in Athens, is one of the finest in Lowell. For much of the 19th century, the house was occupied by the Spalding family, who had substantial real estate holdings in Lowell.



**12. Central Street.** Among the early residences of Chapel Hill are traditionally-styled double houses sheathed in brick, clapboards or both materials. Similar house setbacks, siting and architectural scale provide visual continuity, and elegant entry porticoes carried by fluted columns also enhance the street.





13. 492 Gorham St., 1840s. Broad-gable double houses made of brick are not as common as those of frame construction. Located at the terminus of the Lowell Connector, this handsome Greek Revival residence has retained its double entrance with side pilasters and shared granite lintel, tall end chimneys, boldly articulated pediment, granite trim and six over six sash.

14. 75 Chapel St., ca. 1847-49. John B. Tuttle, a mason, erected this broad-gable Greek Revival house. Although similar to 492 Gorham St., it carries a finely detailed portico supported by fluted Ionic columns. The double trabeated entrance flanked by pilasters is also typical of the Greek Revival period.





**15. Colburn School, 122 Lawrence St., 1840.** The oldest school building still in use in Lowell, the Colburn School was designed by a local school principal. Like other schools of the period, it contained a single school room capable of holding 200 students and two recitation rooms. Its simple Greek Revival form was the traditional style used for Lowell's public buildings during the 1830s and 1840s and can also be seen in the Old Market House, Franklin School and Old City Hall.



**16. 412 and 414 Gorham St., 1840s.** In the 1840s the Greek Revival style was used almost exclusively for worker's houses. Gable-end siting (the narrower end of the house facing the street) was ideal for long, narrow city lots, and improved building technology made standardized mill work available to owners of all income levels. The recessed entrance of the house on the left has retained its tra-beated door surround.



**17. William Nichols House, 11 Centre St., 1841.** The two story, full-width columned portico of this house makes it one of the area's finest works of architecture. Of all the various forms the Greek Revival style could take, this most closely resembles the Greek temple from which the style originated. William Nichols, the first resident, was the prosperous owner of a grocery store which stood at the corner of Central and Church Street.



18. **Walnut Street, 1847-48.** The land between Gorham and Chapel Streets, developed rapidly after the 1845 auction. The then-fashionable Greek Revival and Italianate sidehall dwellings proved ideal for narrow city lots. Each lot was developed individually, exemplified in the variations in size and detail of the houses.



19. **139 Chapel St., late 1840s.** This exceptionally ornate Italianate house employs a wide variety of architectural detail to create a rich, three-dimensional effect. Windows and doors framed with rope molding, brackets, bay windows, molded window caps and carved double doors are used extensively. Between 1850 and 1880 more Italianate houses were built in Lowell than any other style of building.



19. The Italianate style is readily identified by the use of brackets, most commonly found at roof eaves, on bay windows and beneath door hoods.







**20. Hocum Hosford House, 574 Central, ca. 1856.** During the 1850s, successful merchants erected elegant Italianate residences throughout the city. Hosford's house, with its handsomely carved double doors and columned portico, is among the most stylish on Chapel Hill. Founder of Lowell's largest dry goods store, Hosford also served as mayor from 1862-64 and erected the Masonic Temple on Merrimack St.

**21. Cottage Street School, Chapel St., 1858.** When the Cottage St. School was built, there was considerable public concern about providing adequate school yards to avoid turning "the scholars into the public street". Both the Cottage St. and Pond St. School, erected the same year in Belvidere, addressed this need. These are the oldest surviving primary school buildings in the city.





22. Samuel Wood House, 648 Central St., ca. 1872. Samuel Wood, a wholesale grain merchant, erected Chapel Hill's most stylish Second Empire house, sited prominently on a large lot in Hosford Square. In addition to the mansard roof, the hallmark of the style, noteworthy features include flush wood siding scored to simulate stone, carved entrance doors, rope molding and ornamental ironwork. In the early 20th century, the house was used as a Children's Home.



23. Lyon Street School, 920 Central St., 1876. The handsome Italianate facade of the Lyon School, evidenced in the paired round-arched windows with molded caps, and bracketed cornice, attests to the prosperity and pride in civic architecture the city enjoyed in the post-Civil War decades. By 1876, the number of Irish workers settling on Chapel Hill had increased significantly.







**24. Richmond Mill Storehouse, Lawrence St., ca. 1850.** The Concord River was exploited for water power even before the textile mills were established in the 1820s. This rubblestone building was the storehouse for Richmond's paper and cotton batting mill. Note that although the rubblestone is carefully laid in horizontal courses along the front of the building, the sides and rear are constructed of randomly laid stone. Nearby, at 224, 228 and 310-326 Lawrence St., are dwellings built to house some of the mill's employees.



**25. 44-48 Elm Street ca. 1900.** 3 or 4 story frame structures with low-pitched gable or flat roofs replaced lower-density mill workers' dwellings in the late 19th century.



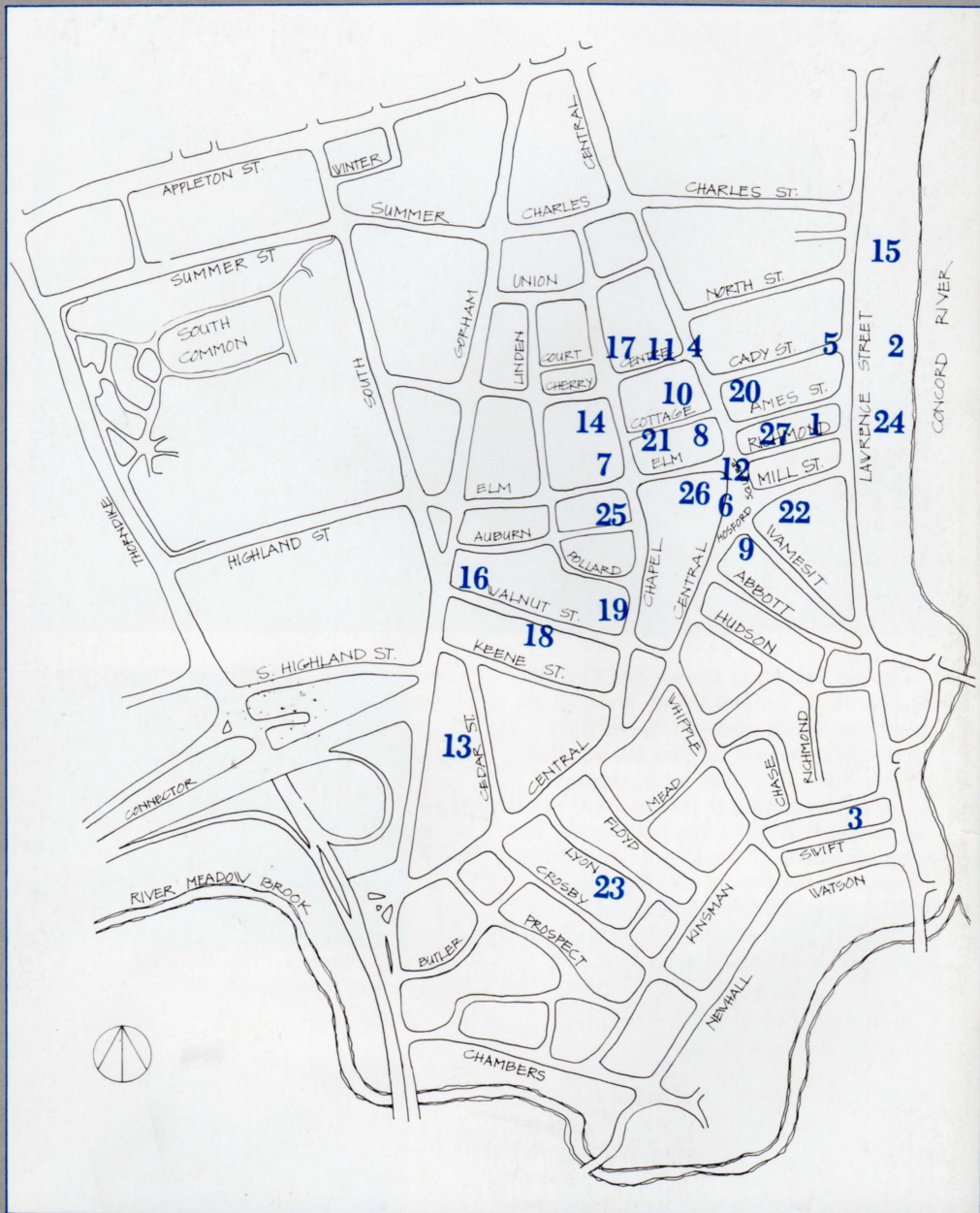
26. 621-27 Central St., ca. 1895. Three-decker buildings are rare on Chapel Hill because most of the available land was built up by the time they became popular elsewhere in Massachusetts. A few, with spacious floor plans and plentiful light, were constructed on Chapel Hill between 1880 and 1910. Double three-deckers, such as the one pictured above, contained six apartments, each with its own porch and bay window. The building has retained its original clapboard and shingle siding, dentil frieze and porch balustrades. It was built on the site of the Methodist Church, one of two early churches which lent Chapel Hill its name.



27. Detail, 604 Central St., ca. 1892. The sunburst motif was a popular ornament on Queen Anne dwellings at the turn of the century.



# Chapel Hill Tour Map



Prepared by Elizabeth Durfee Hengen and Landscape Research for the City of Lowell, Division of Planning and Development with funds from the Community Development Block Grant Program.

